

Preface

“The appropriations process one way or another affects everything the government does,” commented J. Keith Kennedy on his unprecedented three tours of duty as staff director and chief clerk for the Senate Appropriations Committee. The committee handles all federal spending, an annual function that has made it one of the largest, most powerful and prestigious of Senate committees. When Kennedy first became staff director in 1981 there were 79 members of the committee’s staff; and when he retired in 2006, the staff had risen to 125. The complex system of appropriating, shared by the Senate and House, and subject to presidential veto, stimulated much controversy during the 1980s and 1990s, from massive federal deficits, to a temporary shut down of the federal government, to an increasing tendency of legislators to “earmark” appropriations for specific projects. Kennedy’s oral history offers his unique perspective on this process and the sparring between the legislative and executive branches.

Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on April 29, 1948, Keith Kennedy attended public schools in North Carolina and Minnesota. He received a B.A. in 1970 and a Master of Divinity degree in 1974, both from Duke University. In 1972 a Duke internship program brought him to Washington, where he interned for Oregon Republican Senator Mark Hatfield. That experience led to his appointment as a legislative assistant to Senator Hatfield from 1973 to 1977. Kennedy then moved to the professional staff of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, from 1977 to 1979, and of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water of the Senate Appropriations Committee, from 1979 to 1981.

Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980 carried Republicans into the majority in the Senate for the first time in more than a quarter century. Senator Hatfield became chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and Keith Kennedy served as the committee’s staff director and chief clerk. Republicans lost the majority in the election of 1986, after which Kennedy became minority staff director until 1995, and majority staff director once again until 1997.

“I would have to have volumes to describe the history, the experiences we have shared together,” Senator Hatfield said of Keith Kennedy when they both retired from Senate service in 1997. Kennedy became a senior public policy advisor at Baker, Donelson, Bearman and Caldwell, at the invitation of former Senate majority leader Howard Baker. Then in 2003, he returned to the Senate as Deputy to Sergeant at Arms William H. Pickle,

serving in effect as chief operating officer of the Senate's largest staff organization, supervising more than 800 employees whose responsibilities ranged from providing security for senators, staff, and visitors to the Capitol, to providing information technology and telecommunications service in Washington and in more than four hundred senatorial state offices.

Before returning to Baker Donelson as senior managing partner, Kennedy from 2005 until 2006 again served as majority staff director of the Senate Appropriations Committee, this time under chairman Thad Cochran, a Republican from Mississippi. "Our staff members are the very best," Chairman Cochran asserted in 2006. "We are very fortunate in the Senate to have the benefit of the services of Keith Kennedy, who is staff director of the Appropriations Committee. The committee's ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, Senator Robert C. Byrd, seconded this tribute. "There is a man, Keith Kennedy," said Senator Byrd. "He knows what he is doing. He knows this bill up and down and sideways. Keith Kennedy. I am grateful that the chair has chosen him."

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard University Press, 1991), *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001), and *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford University Press, 2005). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.